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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It's been a typical new year - plenty of snow and cold here in the Northeast lately has been really brutal. This kind of weather used to be relished when I was a kid - sledding and skating, snowball fights until dark, and building of snow "caves" in the huge piles of snow left by the snow plows! These days, it's more of a giant inconvenience than anything else. But, I still enjoy it when I don't have to worry about cleaning it up!

Anyway, that's life in New England; and we're used to it. Don't always have to "like" it...

Like many of you, I've been enjoying many of my recent holiday gifts. I'm still a kid at heart (just not the weather-related fun!), and enjoy various new gadgets and what I consider "toys". I've been giving my new iPod-Touch a good workout, and still learning and using it more. It's been fun; I just wish that there were more available free wi-fi access in my area! I've also been using my new GPS. And of course, a few new games that have been taking a lot of game-playing time! Yep, it was a great holiday for gifts this year!

I know it's another week here at A-ONE in which I'm behind getting another issue out, so I hope that you'll bear with me. I know it will be worth the extra few minutes of waiting!

Until next time...

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The Atari Music Network is Live!

From sequencing Tangerine Dream concerts in the 80's to tearing up the dance floor at the New York Blip Fest in 2010, Atari's reputation as a music monster machine has persisted for a quarter of a century. The secret behind its success is clear: Atari was perfect from the beginning - it didn't need to change. For MIDI enthusiasts, the Atari was and still is the ultimate bridge between man, music, and machine. For chiptunists, the Atari offers a canvas of unexplored sonic colors for electronica and 8-bit pop. AMN believes that Atari isn't just about nostalgia; its about utilizing an alternative computer platform for specialized digital music creation.

On Jan. 1, 2010, The Atari Music Network (AMN) was launched, marking the beginning of an exciting new era for Atari based musicians and developers by offering news, resources, and an extensive social network area.

The Atari Music Network (AMN) Mission Statement and Features

The Atari Music Network (AMN) aims to:

* Stimulate social interaction of Atari based musicians and developers as one global community.
* Inspire and support Atari hardware and software developers to update and resell their products or place abandonware into the public domain.
* Deliver relevant news, product information, downloads, and hardware support
* Provide free marketing for Atari based musicians, albums, and events
* Bolster Atari’s presence in the 8-bit pop scene
* Archive, catalog, and preserve Atari music software for future Atari generations
* Encourage the pirating and cracking of ex-commercial software (ethical rules apply)

AMN Currently Features

* Discussion Forums: The Heart of the Atari Music Community
* Worldwide Ebay Power-Searches: Dozens of Predefined Atari Hardware and Software Searches
* Facebook Group: Connecting AMN to a Wider Audience
* Featured News & Articles: Showcasing Atari Musicians, Developers, and Events
* Frankenstein Mods: How-to Guides of user’s Hardware Hacks and Mods
* Hardware Catalog: An Archive of Music Related Atari Peripherals
* Software Catalog: Music Software Downloads Including Freeware and Cracked Abandonware

AMN Future Features (To be Announced)

* Atari E-Store : A Centralized, Secure, and SEO Enhanced E-commerce site to help developers reach a wider target audience
* Artist’s Self Promotion: Dedicated Profile Pages for Artist’s to Create Sample Albums and Promotional Materials

You can also join the Atari Music Network Facebook Group here: http://www.facebook.com/home.php?filter ... 5513878661

New Amiga Sports Programmable Co-Processor, Dualcore PPC

After days of wild speculation and ridiculously fast-growing threads on AmigaWorld.net, we finally know most of what we need to know about the new Amiga. This is not just a random PowerPC evaluation board that you can stuff in a generic case - no, this is an all-new system with a custom motherboard, and some very, very interesting innovations - like a fully customisable co-processor. Twenty-five years after the introduction of the first Amiga, this is one heck of a machine.

The new machine is called the AmigaOne X1000, a nod to the original A1000

Amiga that stunned the world 25 years ago, bringing features like multitasking, accelerated graphics, and on-the-fly resolution changes to the world of computing in a time where Windows didn’t have overlapping windows, and where the monochrome Macintosh couldn’t hold more than 8 pages in its word processor.

The AmigaOne X1000 catapults the Amiga platform into modernity, providing a rather flexible and powerful machine to run the AmigaOS on. It comes with a dual-core PowerPC processor, conforming to the Power ISA 2.04 standard. They cannot exactly reveal which processor it is, as orders from "higher up" forbid them to (AMCC Titan?). AmigaOS 4 developers currently run the processor at 1.6Ghz, but this is not the actual nominal clock speed.

Apart from the processor, the AmigaOne X1000 comes with some innovations that take the machine beyond the level of mere custom chips. The original Amiga was the first machine to employ the idea of custom chips for e.g. graphics, a practice adopted by the PC and Mac worlds much, much later (but in a cruder manner), so with the X1000, A-eon is taking it a step further: customisable processors.

The X1000 has an XMOS XCore, as the rumour mill had already suggested, and A-eon has renamed it Xena, in keeping with the traditions of the Amiga world. It’s a programmable CPU, following the Software Defined Silicon concept developed by XMOS. INMOS transputer architect David May is one of the people behind XMOS.

"Capable of eight concurrent real-time threads with shared memory space, at up to 400 MIPS (about 6 68060s worth), Xena gives the X1000 a very flexible, very expandable co-processor," A-eon writes, "The uses are endless; control hardware, DSP functions, robotics, display - even SID chip and console emulators."

If 400 MIPS sounds a bit slow to you, wait until you hear about the Xorro slot.

To accompany ’Xena’, we have ’Xorro’, a new slot using an industry-standard PCIe x8 form factor to give access to the ’Xena’ IO. This will be the route to Xena’s 64 IO lines, which are dynamically configurable as input, output, or bidirectional. ’Xorro’ will allow bridging Xena to external hardware for control purposes, to internal systems, or to other Xcore processors. This last point is worth more exploration; XCore is a parallel processing architecture, and if you want more power, you can simply chain more XCores together [something like this]. Reference boards have been made with up to 256 cores, offering a theoretical 102400 MIPS. Those of you interested in high-end imaging or scientific applications, for example, take note.

I have to say that I absolutely love this. Of course, I can’t program such chips myself (or at all), but the idea of putting something as flexible as this in the hands of talented and resourceful programmers just makes me very, very excited about what they can come up with. It won’t catapult the Amiga into the realms of Windows and Mac OS X, but it does give it a clear-cut advantage over them.

The full specifications for the AmigaOne X1000 board are as follows:

* ATX Formfactor
* Dual-core PowerISA v2.04+ CPU
* "Xena" XMOS XS1-L1 128 SDS
* 7.1 channel HD audio
* 4x DDR2 RAM slots

* 10x USB 2.0
* 1x Gigabit Ethernet
* 2x PCIe x16 slots (1x16 or 2x8)
* 2x PCIe x1 slots
* 1x Xorro slot
* 2x PCI legacy slots
* 2x RS232
* 4x SATA 2 connectors
* 1x IDE connector
* JTAG connector
* 1x Compact Flash

The machine will come with a custom case too, but little is known about that for now, apart from a small shot that didn't reveal anything specific. Together with ACube's sam440ep at the lower end, the X1000 hopes to usher in a brighter future for the Amiga platform. The X1000 will arrive before the summer, and will be cheaper than the original A1000 - which cost 1295 USD in '80s money.

"Thanks to Xena and the Xorro interface, the X1000 offers extraordinary flexibility. We believe that with this easy gateway to the world of 'Software Defined Silicon' and a path to massive parallelism, the X1000 will once more make the AmigaOS platform the best choice for truly creative and unique applications," A-eon writes, "For custom hardware control from robotics to theatrical lighting, for hobbyist creativity, for hardware hacking and for a multitude of applications we haven't even imagined yet, the X1000 is a dream platform - and therein lies another meaning of 'X', the unknown. It is you, not us, who will define the future."

After so many dark years of uncertainty and legal nonsense, it's great to see the persistence of the Amiga community rewarded with a truly special computer. Boing!

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It's been a looong week. Sickness has come early this year, and I'm suffering through a sinus infection.

I wonder how the human race has survived for this amount of time with all the things out there that can subdue us so easily. I think we're probably victims of our own success and the fact that we learned to modify our environment instead of our environment modifying us is a big key. In other words, once we started acting instead of reacting.

Now, I've had sinus infections before. Anyone who has knows the feeling and knows what it is fairly quickly. The pressure, the burning, the raw feeling.

Yeah, it was a sinus infection for sure. My eyes felt like they'd pop out if I sneezed too hard, my sinuses were raw and breathing hurt. The

pressure was strong enough that it hurt to wear my glasses.

Now, you've heard me complain about insurance and what it costs me and what I think it's worth, right? Well, despite paying 147 dollars a week for this insurance (about to go up to 214 a week unless we change plans), I still need to pay my physician $20 for an office visit. Shouldn't I be able to deduct that from what I pay these bloodsuckers that week? It makes sense to me.

Anyway, it's a moot point. By the time I got in to see my primary physician, I'd probably be in shock from the infection. I mean, c'mon, a week and a half to get in to see him? No thanks.

But there IS this walk-in treatment center with a doctor that I genuinely like and respect close by. He's a good doctor, one of three, who staff this place. You walk in, you write your name down on the pad and sit for a few minutes, then they call you and get your info. And then...

The doctor sees you! Just like that! Like magic! Can you imagine? What a revolutionary idea! A brand new concept! A doctor who can see you when you are actually sick! Revolutionary!

The down-side, however, is that my insurance refuses to pay for it, calling it 'emergency care', which it does not consider necessary for a simple sinus infection. So the entire cost falls to me. Now, shouldn't I be able to deduct that from what the insurance companies suck out of my wallet every damned week? Makes sense to me.

So, instead of waiting for more than a week to get in to see my doctor, and instead of paying the entire cost of going to the treatment center, I decide to treat myself. I take the $20.00 that I would have had to pay the doctor's office out of my own pocket and buy a bottle of olive leave extract (OLE) capsules... supposed to be a very good, natural antibiotic. At this point, it's worth a shot, right?

I'm not advocating the use of OLE over advanced medicine, nor am I advocating self-diagnosis. I'm just telling you what I've been doing. If you decide to research these things and try them, well, who am I to tell you 'no', right?

Well, after 4 days on the stuff, taking one capsule, three times a day, I can report that the infection is on the run. It's amazing to me. It's actually working! I can't say that it'll work on every infection every time, but it's working on this one, now.

My head is clearing and, yes, it's taken four days, but if I remember correctly, the last time I took the latest whiz-bang antibiotic as prescribed by my doctor, it was five once-a-day doses that were supposed to work for 10 days. I didn't feel any relief at all for 7 days, so I seem to be ahead of the curve there. And that latest 5 day antibiotic was hellishly expensive too. It cost ME $35.00 if I remember correctly, but that was the co-pay. The insurance company was supposed to pick up the balance, which was fifty-plus dollars.

So this way I saved everybody some money. I saved myself the office visit to the treatment center and the copay of the antibiotic he would have prescribed, and I saved the insurance company the amounts THEY would have paid to the doctor and the pharmacy. Shouldn't I be able to take that off the amount they take out of my wallet every week? Makes sense to me.

But in the end, sick is sick and I’m sitting here, winded and wondering why it is that I never suffered like this back when I was smoking cigarettes.

But the bottom line is that I’m still paying for insurance and working on ways to NOT have to use it. Does THAT make any sense? Should we have to do that? Shouldn’t the insurance companies be kissing my butt somehow, sucking up to me like gambling casinos do with free drinks and cheap buffets to keep me coming back and throwing my hard-earned money away? Shouldn’t they provide me with at least some kind of show while they’re picking my pocket? Shouldn’t I be able to take that off the amount they take out of my wallet every week? Makes sense to me.

Well folks, I’m going to go take another Olive Leave Extract capsule and hope that the big drug companies don’t decide to exert pressure on the FDA and have it classified as a dangerous drug or something. Hey, don’t laugh. They did it with red yeast rice... look it up.

Hopefully, the next time we talk I’ll be feeling much better. I MAY still have to go to the doctor and, if I do, I do. But I’m doing what I can to stay the heck away from him and from the insurance company.

So tune in again next week to find out how I’m doing. See ya next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - EA Still To Release Tiger Woods Game!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Chicago Tries To Block GTA IV Game Ad!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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EA Sports Moves Forward with Tiger Game Rollout

EA Sports said on Monday it was moving forward with plans to introduce a Tiger Woods online game despite the top golfer’s public relations nightmare and drastic drop in popularity following his adultery scandal.

The Electronic Arts Inc unit’s president, Peter Moore, said in a company blog, www.itsinthegame.com, that the company would this month begin offering "Tiger Woods PGA Tour Online," a browser-based golf game

developed in the past year.

"Our relationship with Tiger has always been rooted in golf," he wrote on the blog. "We didn't form a relationship with him so that he could act as an arm's length endorser.

"Regardless of what's happening in his personal life ... Tiger Woods is still one of the greatest athletes in history," he added.

EA's move comes four days after AT&T Inc terminated its sponsorship deal with Woods, joining other companies that have either distanced themselves or cut ties with the world's first billionaire athlete since he became engulfed in allegations of multiple extramarital affairs after a minor car accident outside his Florida home November 27.

Woods, believed to be the world's wealthiest athlete, estimated to earn about $100 million a year in endorsement deals before his troubles, confessed on December 11 to "infidelity." He announced he would take an indefinite break from golf to save his marriage to Swedish wife Elin Nordegren.

The game is one of EA Sports' first online efforts, to be offered to consumers initially at no cost during a testing phase, but eventually requiring a subscription fee to play.

EA, which previously had said its Tiger Woods PGA Tour business would remain unchanged, signed a sponsor deal with the world's No. 1 golfer in 1997 and has introduced 12 versions of the video game bearing his name.

However, Moore did not say on Monday whether EA would move forward with the expected rollout this summer of its next Tiger Woods PGA Tour video game, annually one of the company's highest-selling sports products. A spokesman declined further comment.

Previously, technology outsourcing and consulting firm Accenture Plc ended its endorsement deal with Woods, while Procter & Gamble Co's shaving products maker Gillette and Tag Heuer, a unit of LVMH Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton, said they would continue their relationships but drop Woods from their marketing.

In addition to EA Sports, others who have not backed away from Woods include athletic shoe maker Nike Inc, Upper Deck, Berkshire Hathaway's NetJets business and TLC Vision Corp, as well as developers in Dubai working on completing a Tiger Woods golf course project.

Chicago Grand Theft Auto IV-Related Ad Ban Blocked

Some great news from the windy city for gamers today: The US District Court has reportedly issued an injunction against the Chicago Transit Authority, stating that the agency can't ban computer and video game ads.

The CTA, you may recall, ordered Rockstar's Grant Theft Auto IV removed from Chicago buses in April 2008, slightly ahead of the game's release. Their rationale: Local news coverage of several shootings in the city. Publisher Take Two filed suit against the CTA shortly thereafter, alleging the CTA had violated Take Two's contractual and constitutional rights by yanking the ads. The case was settled in September 2008, and the ads

reappeared on buses a few months later in November. Nonetheless, the CTA voted to ban future M- and AO-rated games and issued an ordinance which took effect on January 1, 2009.

In July 2009, the games industry advocacy Entertainment Software Association filed suit against the CTA, challenging the ordinance and the CTA's prohibition of select computer and video game ads. The ESA argued that the CTA's ban "unfairly target[s] the entertainment software industry," "restricts speech in a public forum that is otherwise open to all speakers," "impermissibly discriminates on the basis of viewpoint," and amounts to a "violation of the guarantees of free speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution."

Apparently the judge officiating the case agreed. Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer, acting on behalf of the US District Court for the Northern District of Illionis, stated "the advertisements the CTA wishes to ban promote expression that has constitutional value and implicates core First Amendment concerns." According to the ESA, today's injunction was granted because the court believes the ESA is likely to win on the merits of their claims, should the case go to trial.

"This ruling is a win for Chicago's citizens, the video game industry and, above all, the First Amendment," said ESA president and CEO Michael D. Gallagher in a press statement. "It is our hope that the CTA sees the futility of pursuing this case further. To do so will waste taxpayer money and government resources. Chicago deserves better and we look forward to bringing this matter to an end."

What's more, it's hard to argue with the ESA's contention that the CTA's ordinance is unnecessary because game-related marketing (ads on buses included) is already subject to the Entertainment Software Rating Board's system. The ads for GTA IV that ran on those Chicago buses prior to the CTA's ban carried the game's ESRB-based M-rating, including the game-specific content descriptors like "intense violence," "strong language," and "drugs and alcohol."

What'll happen now? Either the case goes to trial (bet on the ESA), or the CTA drops its discriminatory ordinance.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Comcast, FCC Take Net Neutrality Dispute to Court

The Federal Communications Commission ran into a potential setback Friday in its push to draft rules that would require Internet providers to give equal treatment to all data flowing over their networks.

In hearing a legal dispute between the agency and Comcast Corp., a three-judge federal appeals court panel questioned the commission's

authority to impose so-called "net neutrality" obligations on the nation's largest cable TV and Internet operator. Those rules are intended to prevent broadband providers from abusing their control over the market for high-speed Internet access.

A decision that goes against the FCC could undermine its ability to impose such rules on all broadband companies - not just Comcast.

Friday's oral arguments centered on Comcast's challenge of a 2008 FCC order banning the company from blocking its broadband subscribers from using an online file-sharing technology known as BitTorrent. The commission, at the time headed by Republican Kevin Martin, based its order on a set of net-neutrality principles it adopted in 2005 to prevent broadband providers from favoring or discriminating against certain types of Internet traffic. Those principles have guided the FCC's enforcement of communications laws on a case-by-case basis.

Formally adopting those guidelines as binding regulations is a top priority for the FCC's new Democratic chairman, Julius Genachowski. The agency voted in October to launch a proceeding to write the rules.

But with Comcast appealing the FCC order, a key question for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit is whether the commission has legal authority to impose such obligations. The three-judge panel, which is expected to issue a ruling this spring, appeared skeptical of that on Friday.

Still, in a statement following Friday's arguments, Genachowski he is confident the commission possesses the legal authority it needs "to preserve the free and open Internet."

Comcast had no official comment Friday.

The dispute over network neutrality has pitted some of the country's leading Internet companies, including Google Inc. and the calling service Skype, against the big phone and cable operators.

The Internet companies say that without such rules, broadband providers could become online gatekeepers and prioritize traffic for those who can pay extra, while degrading or blocking cheaper Internet calling services or online video sites that compete with their core businesses.

Indeed, BitTorrent, the online file-sharing technology blocked by Comcast, can be used to transfer large files such as online video, something that threatens Comcast's cable TV business. Public interest groups brought Comcast's actions to the FCC's attention after The Associated Press ran tests and reported that the cable company was interfering with attempts by some subscribers to share files online.

But broadband providers such as Comcast, AT&T Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc. argue that after pouring billions of dollars into their networks, they should be able to offer premium services to differentiate themselves from competitors and earn a healthy return on their investments.

They also insist they need flexibility to manage their systems so high-bandwidth applications such as BitTorrent don't hog too much capacity and slow the network for everyone else.

While these issues are being hashed out in the net neutrality proceeding

at the FCC, the current court case is focused on legal questions.

For its part, Comcast argues that the FCC order is illegal because the agency was seeking to enforce mere policy principles, which don't have the force of regulations or law. As a result, the Philadelphia-based cable company says, it never had clear rules to follow and was never given fair notice of what conduct was prohibited. In fact, Comcast insists, the FCC's current proceeding to adopt the 2005 principles as formal regulations underscores its point.

Comcast also maintains that because that proceeding is still in the early stages, it remains unclear whether the agency even has legal authority to mandate net neutrality obligations.

But the commission argues that a 2005 Supreme Court ruling upholding its move to deregulate Internet service gives it the jurisdiction it needs. The high court upheld the FCC's decision to define broadband as a lightly regulated information service, which is not subject to the obligations traditional telecommunications services have to share their networks with competitors and treat all traffic equally. A 1996 federal telecommunications law, however, gives the agency authority to set rules for information services - including, the FCC argues, net neutrality rules.

An appeals court ruling that rejects this argument could draw Congress into the matter to give the FCC the power to regulate broadband as an information service. Several key lawmakers have already drafted legislation to mandate network neutrality. Or it could force the agency to consider reclassifying broadband as a more heavily regulated telecommunications service that would be subject to non-discrimination rules.

Either way, the case heard Friday could provide a road map. After all, even if the court issues a very narrow ruling - concluding only that FCC's policy principles had were not binding - the FCC's upcoming net neutrality regulations are likely to face a court challenge, too.

HP Puts USB 3.0 Ports in New Laptops

Hewlett-Packard on Wednesday said it has added USB 3.0 ports to its latest laptops that could boost data transfers between computers and devices such as storage drives and digital cameras.

HP will add up to three USB 3.0 ports in EliteBook business laptops to connect to external devices and peripherals. The laptops include EliteBook 8540p and EliteBook 8540w workstation laptops, which are expected to be shown at the International Consumer Electronics Show to be held in Las Vegas between Jan. 7 and 10.

The USB 3.0 standard is a speedier successor to the existing USB 2.0 ports that come with laptops today. When the technology matures, USB 3.0 technology will provide the bandwidth to transfer data close to 10 times quicker than USB 2.0, standards group USB Implementers Forum said on Wednesday.

The addition of USB 3.0 ports will especially help laptops communicate at a much faster rate with high-speed external devices, an HP spokesman said. Around 1GB of data could be moved from a USB 3.0 flash drive to a

host device in 3.3 seconds, compared to 33 seconds for USB 2.0, USB-IF representatives said.

More HP laptops and platforms will include USB 3.0 ports later this year, the HP spokesman said.

HP is perhaps the earliest PC vendor to build USB 3.0 ports into laptops, but it'll probably be a crowded field in a couple of weeks, said Charles King, an analyst at Pund-IT.

"Like any next-generation technology, the value of USB 3.0 will grow as peripheral devices and vendors catch up - a process that tends to be uneven, at best. Since HP manufactures many of its own peripherals, that presents the company an interesting opportunity," King said.

The first peripherals to support the USB 3.0 technology standard could be bandwidth-sensitive devices like large high-definition displays and high speed back-up storage devices, King said.

HP could build USB 3.0 into its own displays, external storage devices and other peripherals of interest to business users, King said.

"The resulting synergies could be highly valuable for the company and discomfiting to competing laptop and peripheral vendors," King said. The use of USB 3.0 could proliferate as devices become lighter and as the use of multimedia applications such as video rises, he said.

External devices that support USB 3.0 are already available. Hard drive company LaCie in December introduced the 2Big USB 3.0, which combines two hard drives in a single unit and can read data at up to 275MB per second using the USB 3.0 standard. Freecom also offers the Hard Drive XS 3.0 external hard drive.

The HP EliteBooks will also include USB 2.0 ports to support legacy technology, an HP spokesman said. The laptops are designed as desktop replacements and come with the latest Intel Core processors, HP said. The laptops weigh 6.4 pounds (2.89 kilograms) and are based on Intel's QM57 chipset.

Starting at US$1,299, that laptops come with either Windows 7, Vista, FreeDos or Linux operating systems and include numerous wireless communications and graphics cards options.

The USB-IF on Wednesday also said it had certified USB 3.0 for HP's Envy 15 and Fujitsu's FMV-Biblo/G70 laptops. The standards group also certified USB 3.0 for motherboards from Asus and Giga-byte Technology.

HP Unveils New PCs

Hewlett-Packard Co is releasing a host of new laptops and netbooks as the technology giant looks to build on its recent momentum in the personal computer market.

The world's largest PC maker unveiled its first-ever touch-enabled netbook as part of its product rollout for the Consumer Electronics Show, which takes place this week in Las Vegas.

The rapid growth of netbooks has bolstered the PC market during the economic downturn. The low-cost PCs are expected to make up roughly one-fifth of all of portable PC shipments this year, according to DisplaySearch, a big jump from 2008.

The Mini 5102, HP's first touchscreen netbook, sports a 10-inch display, weighs in at 2.6 pounds and is being targeted at students and professionals.

It features face recognition software and Intel Corp's next-generation Atom netbook processor, Pineview. It will sell for $399 in the United States.

HP also unveiled the $299 Mini 210 targeted at consumers and the $329 Mini 2102 aimed at business users.

The 10-inch netbooks feature QuickWeb, Linux-based software that allows access to the Internet and files in seconds without booting up.

HP has been heavily promoting touch technology across its PC line, and the company is rolling out its latest full-fledged touch laptop, the TouchSmart tm2, which has a screen that swivels and can lie flat in a tablet mode.

The $949 device features a 12-inch display with capacitive multitouch technology like that found in smartphones and works with either a finger or stylus pen.

HP has continued to gain share in the PC market despite the economic downturn, with both its consumer and commercial PCs performing well.

The company shipped nearly 16 million units in the July-September quarter, according to industry tracker IDC, up 9.3 percent from a year ago.

Microsoft CEO Unveils New HP Tablet

Microsoft Corp Chief Executive Steve Ballmer unveiled a new Hewlett-Packard Co tablet computer on Wednesday, beating Apple Inc's hotly anticipated move into the market.

But analysts were skeptical that Microsoft and HP could generate as much consumer excitement as Apple's new device, widely expected to be unveiled on January 27, though the company has not said anything about it publicly.

Ballmer showed off the new device at the end of his keynote speech at the CES technology show in Las Vegas.

"This great little PC - which will be available later this year - I think many customers are going to be very excited about," said Ballmer, using finger touches to flip through a book on the screen using Amazon.com's Kindle software.

"Everyone's fired up about this type of device," said Kim Caughey, senior analyst at fund manager Fort Pitt Capital Group. Microsoft has "a lot of the pieces in place" to make such a device work, she said, but

it’s not clear that it can claim significant market share.

"How do you make them usable and at a price point people will pay, which I suggest is sub-$500?" asked Caughey.

Ballmer did not detail pricing or when the device will hit stores. An earlier New York Times report said it could go on sale by mid-2010.

Microsoft’s presentation, which kicked off the world’s biggest consumer technology show, started late after a power outage and suffered a few tech hiccups.

After Ballmer, Microsoft’s entertainment and game chief Robbie Bach announced that a new installment of the hugely successful Halo game will be out this year, and its controller-less game system Project Natal will be in stores by the holiday season.

Microsoft, the world’s largest software maker, and HP, the top personal computer maker, are the latest companies to eye tablets that bridge the gap between laptops and smartphones.

Endpoint Technologies analyst Roger Kay said both companies have experience in designing a touch-screen, tablet-style device but that consumer interest in the category has never lived up to the hype.

That could all change, Kay said, if Apple joins the fray. Microsoft and HP faced a difficult challenge in topping whatever device Apple launches, he added.

"The elephant in the room of course is Apple. Other manufacturers are scrambling to get things together before it defines the market," Kay said. "HP may be looking to put a stake in the ground before Apple makes its move."

Talk of Apple’s tablet - potentially the company’s biggest product launch since the iPhone - has swirled in trading rooms, tech websites and industry forums for months. The speculation helped propel Apple’s stock to record highs in January, though some say the device may be overhyped.

HP has been heavily promoting touch technology across its line of PCs, and just announced new products such as an updated version of its TouchSmart swivel-screen convertible laptop, and a touch-enabled netbook.

Although next-generation tablet PCs are scarcely evident on the market, the technology world is abuzz about their potential.

At this week’s CES show, Qualcomm Inc and Nvidia Corp are also expected to unveil so-called smartbooks based on their chips. Freescale Semiconductor already has announced its own version.

Unni Narayanan from Primary Global Research said he does not expect the new tablet to showcase any game-changing innovation, and instead may be more advanced versions of existing HP devices already on the market.

"Our expectation is that it will be a testing-the-waters sort of thing," he said.

From Microsoft’s perspective, Kay said the company wants to "highlight and showcase everything that Windows 7 can do."

The new generation of devices will seek to break Intel Corp's stranglehold on PCs - the chipmaker makes eight out of 10 microprocessors in the global market. Intel's Atom processor now dominates the fast-growing netbook market.

Apple Tablet Device Coming in January

Speculation intensified Monday that Apple Inc. will soon unveil a tablet-style gadget for consuming music, movies, books and other media.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Apple is planning to take the wraps off such a device this month and begin shipping it in March.

That jibes with several online reports that the company has scheduled an event for Jan. 26 or 27 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, one of Apple's customary spaces for product launches.

The gadget, which online pundits have at different times christened the iTablet and the iSlate, is to have a 10-inch to 11-inch touch screen, a bit smaller than those on Apple's MacBook laptops but larger than the iPhone's, said the Journal, citing unnamed people briefed on the matter.

Apple spokesman Steve Dowling said the company does not comment on rumors and speculation.

Apple, which is based in Cupertino, Calif., has so far stayed out of the "netbook" category of small laptops with relatively weak processors and sub-$500 price tags. The company has said it doesn't know how to make a good computer for less than $500, but has indicated it has been considering alternative ideas for that space.

Analysts have predicted Apple's new gadget could cost anywhere from $500 to $1,000, with or without a cellular data plan included.

Also on Monday, Sprint Nextel Corp. said it has made a multiyear deal with a startup called Skiff for a thin electronic-book reader that operates over Sprint's high-speed 3G network as well as Wi-Fi.

The Skiff Reader will have an 11.5-inch screen, larger than those on competing devices including Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle, Sony Corp.'s Reader and Barnes & Noble Inc.'s Nook.

Sprint and Skiff tout the device as the thinnest to date, at just over a quarter of an inch thick. The reader's entire page will be a touch screen, unlike the Kindle, which uses physical buttons for navigation, or the Nook, which has a small built-in touch screen separate from the book page.

The Skiff Reader will connect to its own online content store. Skiff said it is also working with other electronics manufacturers to put its technology into a variety of devices.

The companies are planning to demonstrate the device at this week's International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Its price and availability date were not disclosed.

Lenovo’s Tablet Docks to Form a Notebook

All the deficiencies of a slate tablet don’t seem so bad when you fuse them with all the functionalities of a laptop; that’s exactly what Lenovo did with the IdeaPad U1 Hybrid, which it announced in advance of the CES show here.

The U1 Hybrid is a clamshell laptop that splits into two, like the saucer section on the USS Enterprise of "Star Trek": A slate tablet, which runs on a Qualcomm Snapdragon ARM CPU and the Skylight Linux interface, when a user is Web surfing and on the move. Dock it back into the clamshell, and it seamlessly switches back to a Windows 7 operating system, running on an Intel Core 2 Duo U4100 processor.

Undocked, the tablet weighs 1.6 pounds. Docked in the notebook form factor, the two weigh a combined 3.8 pounds.

This concept is revolutionary but not the only one of its kind (Freescale has already launched a somewhat similar hybrid prototype, although it lacks the separate processors and operating system). The design allows the U1 Hybrid to have two processors and two operating systems, for maximum flexibility. The 11.6-inch LED-lit display detaches itself from a pod-like vessel that’s permanently attached to the bottom half. The slate - docked or undocked - supports two-fingered multi-touch in both Skylight and Windows 7 environments. In the Skylight interface, you have a choice between a 6-panel interface (email, calendar, RSS, social media and bundles services), or a 4-panel one (personal picture, music, video, and document view). It also rotates into landscape or portrait mode.

Both environments also operate under their own hardware specifications. The slate half has an internal 16-Gbyte flash drive, while laptop mode runs on up to a 128-GB SSD. With Windows 7, the laptop uses 4 GB of DDR3 RAM; the Qualcomm ARM processor, on the other hand, is married to 512 Mbytes of DDR1 RAM. And the divisions include separate graphics chips, too: the notebook uses Intel’s GMA chipset and the tablet harnesses the Snapdragon integrated graphics.

The two share components, such as the battery, however. The slate can last up to 8 hours on a single charge and 6 hours when docked. And wireless devices such as 3G, WiFi, and Bluetooth are also shared between the two portions. Otherwise, the U1 Hybrid has all of your basic laptop features, including three USB ports (one of which is an eSATA/USB combo port), VGA, HDMI, Ethernet (RJ-45), and a 4-in-1 reader (Multi-Media Card, Memory Stick, Memory Stick PRO, Secure Digital Card).

Before you get too excited, however, know that this innovation doesn’t run cheap. The Lenovo IdeaPad U1 Hybrid starts at $999, which is about the combined cost of a laptop and a smartbook.

The Print Shop Goes Version 2 - After 20 Years!

If you stepped into an OfficeMax or CompUSA 20 years ago and browsed the software shelves, The Print Shop would be prominently in evidence. In fact, the program was one of the most popular Apple II applications ever. Well,

now, in 2010, at the CES Mommy Summit, The Print Shop 2.0 is being announced by Encore, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Navarre Corp. In truth, there have been numerous versions in between, but the company is taking a fresh start with new version numbering.

The product will ship on January 15 in three editions: The Print Shop, at $29.99; Deluxe, for $49.99; and Professional, for $89.99. The first targets casual users, while Deluxe adds features for design enthusiasts, such as guides, paper stock, and text flow tools; Professional adds features of interest to businesses such as layer management, page numbering, and advanced photo editing.

The software still provides a very easy way to create good looking cards, newsletters, banners, and posters, labels, business cards - just about anything you can think of that can be printed. But it’s been rebuilt from the ground up with a slicker updated user interface and workflow. The new version adds wizards to hundreds of ready-made template for easy, good-looking print projects.

Product Director Jennifer Smiczek told me that the software includes 150 projects that can be completed in under 5 minutes, and from what I saw, several of them took less than a minute. "We took all of the experience we had with customers in the last 25 years, and built a new tool that would work the way they’d want it to," said Smiczek. "A new workflow, a new user interface that’s highly intuitive, all designed to make it easier to create.

A large library of clip art and stock photography is also at The Print Shop users’ disposal. Thumbnails appear in the program, while the content is downloaded after it’s selected by the user. The software doesn’t offer automated sending of creations to printers, but can create high-res JPEGs for delivery to a printer.

Unlike its ancestor, The Print Shop 2.0 is Windows-only, based on Microsoft .NET technology.

Moms and others as well can learn more about and purchase the software at Broderbund.com - now a subsidiary of Encore.

A Gel-Covered Computer Mouse, Just Because

There isn’t much about computers that is warm and fuzzy. But now there’s something kind of squishy.

A startup company is selling a $35 computer mouse with two unusual features - it’s round, and it’s covered in a smooth, gel-like coating. There’s nothing amazing about it, but it raises an interesting idea: Because we spend so much time with our devices, shouldn’t they feel a little friendlier? Does everything have to be hard and sleek?

The company behind the gel-covered mouse, Jelfin LLC, is betting that there are enough people out there who want to enliven their dorm rooms or cubicles by spicing up the prosaic computer control device.

Jelfin’s mouse, which is slightly smaller than a tennis ball, is gray over most of its body, but the scrolling wheel and the plastic bottom come in bright fluorescent colors not often seen on gadgetry.

The mouse, which for now is sold only on Amazon, comes in a small metal case resembling those novelty-store cans from which a fake snake pops out. The Jelfin can is heart attack-free, however, and once you remove the mouse and plug it into the USB port of a Windows, Mac or Linux computer, you should be ready to go.

I would not pay $35 for it, however. You can get a decent mouse for less, and it might be an ergonomic disaster to work for extended stretches in the position many people could be inclined to adopt - with your knuckles positioned higher than your wrist as if you're about to throw a split-fingered fastball.

But I will say that it felt good to cruise around my computer screen while gripping something with a hint of softness. The gel material that covers most of the mouse is not thick enough to make it something you can squeeze deeply, like some stress-release ball, but it provides a nice little cushion for your hand.

Perhaps the softest groundbreaker in computing has been the Chumby, a little touch-screen computer that comes in a stuffed leather case. But its maker's goal is not necessarily to sell pillowy computers - Chumbys now also are available in a harder, plastic casing. Instead, the company mainly wants to provide software that enables a variety of gizmos to show photos, display the weather or perform other Internet-connected services.

So if Jelfin follows through on its plans for more mushy accessories - perhaps keyboards or cell phone cases could benefit from this treatment - the company could find itself with few competitors when it comes to pliable products. It might have a niche filled with gel.

Will the Internet Run Out of IP Addresses in 2012?

Vint Cerf, also known as the father of the Internet, warned that we'd run out of IP addresses by 2010. That didn't happen. Now some pundits are predicting 2012 as the new doom-and-gloom date for the World Wide Web.

No one knows for sure when the original pool of IP addresses will be depleted, but one thing is certain: The continued growth of the Internet and the increasing use of machine-to-machine communications makes it likely - and soon.

Here's how it works in a nutshell: IP version 4, or IPv4, addresses are allocated by the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) to regional registries. The registries then allocate IPv4 addresses to individual customers. As it stands, the last free pool at IANA is tracking for September 2011 - and the last address would be offered to an individual customer about a year later, or about 700 days from now.

"As with all scarce resources, occupation of new address resources will slow down as the free pool shrinks, just as oil consumption decreases as the price goes up," said Dr. Milton Mueller, a professor at the Syracuse University School Of Information Studies' Internet Governance Project. "But sooner or later, the free pool will be gone. IPv4 addresses are fixed in number and most of them have already been handed out to organizations and ISPs."

Several factors contribute to address scarcity. First, the Internet address space is a fixed quantity, set by the basic Internet protocol standard of 1981. It allows for about four billion unique bit combinations. In the early years of Internet development, address blocks were handed out too easily, Mueller said, because no one knew the Internet would become so large. By 1993, about 40 percent of the addresses had already been given out.

"The regional address registries don't have effective reclamation policies, so once they give out an address block, it never comes back, regardless of how efficiently it is used," Mueller said. "A more fundamental cause of inefficient address usage is the need for aggregation of routes. This is difficult to explain simply, but the current system of routing makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for users to carve up their address blocks into smaller pieces and move them around to different users, so there is a lot of underutilized address space."

What happens when we run out of IPv4 addresses? The impact of an IPv4 address exhaust can manifest itself in a number of ways - technical and business, according to Pravin Mahajan, marketing manager for Cisco's Core Solutions. There's a possibility of a 'last-chance' rush on the registries, he said, along with industry talk about the possibility of trading IPv4 addresses. However no such model exists today or is forecast to be built.

"Apart from these issues which relate to the procurement of addresses, there's the issue of optimization with available addresses. Optimization involves reuse of existing addresses with translation and tunneling techniques," Mahajan said. "The business impact of the exhaust is already being felt in some market opportunities. Smart grid involves IP-enabling the electric power infrastructure."

According to Mueller, when the world runs out of IPv4 addresses, it will force network operators to use their address resources more carefully and promote two structural adjustments. First, it will promote the use of network address translators (NATs) that put an entire organizational network in a private address space. Second, it will, hopefully, eventually drive ISPs and others to adopt the new Internet protocol, IPv6, which has a very large address space.

Meeting the challenge means understanding the distinction between IPv4 addresses (the established Internet protocol) and IPv6 addresses, which are not widely used yet.

The Internet itself is unlikely to run out of IP addresses because IPv6 offers a virtually infinite pool. However, the challenge is to make the transition from IPv4 to IPv6. Eventually providers will adopt IPv6 addressing, and the IPv4 exhaust could prompt them to move faster on its adoption.

"The migration to IPv6 will take years, and that will require both standards to be in place for a long time," Mueller said. "If we really develop shortages of IP addresses, it could crimp the growth of the Internet and undermine its performance in various ways."

As Mueller sees it, the best solution in the short term is for the regional address registries to allow market trading of address resources - with some restrictions to maintain aggregation - and to institute more effective

policies to reclaim unused address resources. "Longer term," he said, "we must either standardize NAT arrangements in a way that allows a huge expansion of the address space, or migrate to IPv6."

Mahajan has a similar take. Any technology transition usually involves periods of coexistence before the complete shift. In this case, the transition is expected to occur over many years and possibly decades. That points to an industry need for a coherent plan during this long migration.

"The plan needs to incorporate preservation of the existing mode of operations, preparation for the new technology coexisting with the old, and maintain or enhance business prosperity along the process," Mahajan said. "Industry participants may move at a different pace based on their vertical segment - wireline, mobile, cable, etc. - geography and other drivers. The best solution for the transition needs to factor in all of these dynamic components."

Google’s Chrome Browser Passes Apple’s Safari

Fifteen months ago, Google introduced its Chrome browser promising speed, stability and security. Google also amped up the browser wars with established players like Microsoft’s Internet Explorer, Mozilla’s Firefox, and Apple’s Safari. The latest monthly numbers show Google is making progress in its quest to become the browser of choice.

In December, Google’s Chrome browser hit a milestone, outpacing Safari in worldwide usage metrics. According to research by Net Applications involving 160 million monthly visitors, Chrome usage climbed from 3.9 percent to 4.6 percent last month. Although Safari use also grew - from 4.4 percent to 4.5 percent - it wasn’t enough to stem the rising Chrome tide.

Microsoft’s Internet Explorer still dominates the browser market with a nearly 63 percent share in December. But IE continues to bleed, dropping from 63.6 percent in November to 62.7 percent in December. Firefox seems to be the key beneficiary of Microsoft’s loss as the open-source browser’s market share grew slightly from 24.6 percent to 24.7 percent.

Chrome’s growth at Apple’s expense comes, in part, from Apple users. Google finally released a beta version of Chrome for Mac in early December. Google said the Mac version took longer than the company expected.

Google based its Mac version on the Windows version while accommodating Apple’s Mac OS X. For example, Google Chrome for Mac beta has integrated a key chain and uses Mac-style animations when users open the Bookmarks bar. The Mac version doesn’t yet incorporate extensions, bookmark synchronization, a bookmark manager, or the cookie manager that the Windows version offers, but the safety features are intact.

Chrome likely also got a bump from Linux users who were curious about how the new browser compares to Firefox. Google launched the Linux version of Chrome alongside the Mac version. With the Linux version, Google said it maintained its focus on speed, stability and security, while taking pains to make sure the browser integrated well with the Linux ecosystem. That includes tight integration with native GTK themes

and updates managed by the standard system package manager.

Another reason for the Chrome browser's surge past Safari is Google's efforts to publicize its Chrome operating system. The Google home page, the most visited on the web, has featured an ad for Chrome, noted Michael Gartenberg, a vice president at Interpret. That, he said, made a significant difference in exposing people to Chrome.

But Gartenberg wonders at what expense Google is gaining ground in the browser wars. Google is the default search engine in Safari and Firefox. As Google continues to debut its own products, Gartenberg wonders if companies like Apple and Mozilla will give Google the same positioning they've given the search giant in the past.

"Google is using an interesting strategy. As opposed to partnering for its position, Google is looking to totally control that position through its own products and its own services," Gartenberg said. "It's going to be interesting to see how that shakes out."

Mr. Bean 'Invades' Spain's EU Website

Some visitors to Spain's EU presidency website were Monday directed to a blog that showed Mr Bean instead of the country's prime minister, whose resemblance to the hapless comic character is a long-standing joke.

The government emphasized in a statement that the site itself, www.eu2010.es, had not been attacked, but that an unidentified hacker had taken a screenshot of the home page to make a photo montage.

The mock-up replaced Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero with a smiling Mr Bean, the television and movie character played by British actor Rowan Atkinson, saying "Hi there".

The government, which took over the six-month rotating presidency of the EU on January 1, admitted that the site had become saturated as thousands of Internet users sought to confirm press reports of the spoof.

"The alleged attack exploited a vulnerability called XSS (cross site scripting) to users of the website...," the government statement said.

"For such attacks to be effective, they must be combined with any additional technique that tricks the user to the website to click on a link that has been maliciously modified..."

Opponents of Zapatero often poke fun at the prime minister by comparing him to Mr Bean.

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